

NEWS RELEASE

Office of Communications



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CHULA VISTA WORKING TO PRESERVE WILDLIFE AND HABITAT AREAS

New signage and fencing to reinforce closed access to sensitive habitat

The City of Chula Vista is installing additional signage and fencing to close access to preserved lands within the Rolling Hills Ranch III Open Space Preserve located in eastern Chula Vista. Recent inspection of the area has shown damage to the preserve caused by hikers.

Rolling Hills Ranch Open Space Preserve is a key component of the City's 9,300 acre Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) Subarea Plan Preserve. The City's overall goal for the MSCP program is to protect, maintain, and enhance the biological diversity throughout the dedicated lands and conserve viable populations. However, unauthorized and illegal user-created trails have been an on-going challenge in this area and are the cause of habitat loss for several endangered and/or threatened wildlife species. These include the federally endangered Quino checkerspot butterfly, the federally and state listed coastal California gnatcatcher, and the federally listed and state endangered Otay tarplant. To comply with federal, state and City laws, the City is installing additional signage and fencing to restrict access to the Open Space Preserve which is being used to illegally climb Mt. San Miguel.

These management efforts also will serve to protect conserved lands within the adjacent U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's San Diego National Wildlife Refuge which was established in 1996. Stretching from Jamul to communities in Spring Valley and eastern Chula Vista, the 11,150 acre refuge is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's contribution to the San Diego County MSCP Subregional Plan.

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The new “NO TRESPASSING” signs will be posted at existing utility access areas off Coastal Hills Drive and Iron Gate Lane. Trespassing in California can be prosecuted as a misdemeanor under the Penal Code with penalties of up to six (6) months in county jail and/or a fine of up to one thousand dollars (\$1,000).

Since the early 2000s, the access area and Mt. San Miguel have been closed to hikers, pedestrians, and bicyclists. Despite existing signage and enforcement efforts, the Rolling Hills Ranch Open Space Preserve, the Refuge, and surrounding private lands have been negatively impacted by human interaction. Sensitive plants have been trampled, lands disturbed, and trash and debris have been discarded in the area. Because these trails are illegal, they are not maintained by the City or any other government agency. Slippery and unstable footing, steep slopes, rattlesnakes, and some noxious plants make trespassing into the preserve dangerous as well as illegal.

Authorized hiking and biking trails are accessible throughout the City of Chula Vista including trails along the Otay Lakes, Olympic Training Center, Mountain Hawk Park, and Mount San Miguel Park. Also nearby are trails on County lands including Otay Lakes County Park, Otay Valley Regional Park, and Sweetwater Regional Park. For more information, please go to www.chulavistaca.gov, www.sdparks.org, or www.fws.gov/refuge/san_diego/.

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NOTE: Media may request a PDF of aerial maps showing the preserve with no visible trail in 2008 and the trail clearly visible in 2012 and 2014. Please email dhowell@chulavistaca.gov if you would like the high resolution maps.